

# Uniting Forces to Improve Education

Column Editor: H. Gordon Hullfish

## Is ASCD a Force Affecting American Education?

**T**HE ASCD, in its present form, is sixteen years old.

It has, during this time, through conferences (national and state-wide), through publications, through committees and commissions, and through the enthusiasm of individual members, worked to gain a forward look in curriculum development and supervision.

It has tried to give reality, in the working life of schools, to what is known, thus far, about the ways in which individuals may grow most effectively through participative opportunities provided them to work responsibly in groups that confront common problems and share a concern to reach solutions on which they may stand together—and then grow further from this base.

It has tried to bring to bear upon both curriculum development and supervision what is known about the ways in which knowledge, functioning as individuals solve the specific problems they face in their daily lives, throws light upon them. It then leaps vitally from the proper boundaries within which it is organized to facilitate its continuing development and extension. This concern has led to differing proposals for curriculum reconstruction. One of these, the core idea, has been given special attention. This idea is by no means accepted by all, however, as an exclusive and excluding approach to the remaking of the curriculum.

The Association tried, along with many

other professional and lay organizations, to give such direction to the public schools that a central concern of these schools shall be to enhance the development of young people so that they come into their maturity with a potential for effective citizenship that exceeds the potential which those who are now the senior citizens brought to their citizenship role.

It is continuing, through its board of directors, its executive committee, its committees and commissions, and its membership at large, to explore critically all areas of educational experience in ways that will increase the ability of those who are responsible for curriculum development and supervision to provide *creative* leadership for all who give the educative process its character and quality—boards of education, school architects, parents (and lay groups generally), administrators and the status leaders who represent them, and, finally, the teachers in whose hands rests the basic responsibility for transforming education.

It has attempted, within the limits of a national and hence a diversified membership, and within the limit set by the difficulty of carrying communication forward among individuals whose grounds of valuing are not identical, to advance on the front of reducing discriminations as these are experienced by the children our schools serve.

It has been aware of the tremendous

changes in technology which have reduced a world once essentially mysterious to many to a common meeting ground where the problems of all men are now intermingled beyond the point of separation. It understands, therefore, why it is that peoples over the world struggle to secure those elementary rights of freedom which our forebears, in consequence of a comparable struggle, bequeathed to us as a normal condition of our lives. And it knows, as men now do generally, that the annihilation of man and his works could become a frightful reality. It has given its continuing attention, therefore, to the furtherance of international understanding through the work of the schools.

These, on the face, are important activities. The ASCD has a right to a proper pride for having shouldered such responsibilities. Yet, as one looks over the current educational scene, the question

arises as to whether school people and school programs have undergone a reconstruction commensurate with the expenditure of energy on the part of the membership of the Association.

It seems to be apparent to some who seek changes in our schools that a negative answer must be forthcoming. Curricula have a way of continuing the patterns of the past. Teaching methods, often seeming to be different on the surface, manage to maintain a relationship to ends for which they are not, in fact, appropriate means. Creative leadership in curriculum development and supervision is far from having been universally achieved. Teachers are involved in but small percentage in participative activities in which they share responsibility with status leaders for curriculum change. Young people, in consequence, are still failing, in numbers too large to permit the profession to rest with an easy con-

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"Dorothy will always remember the great contributions of Mexicans to our own American life, because that Digest article engaged her interest and therefore her intelligence. The Better Reading supplement in the Educational Edition of the Digest does a fine job of improving reading skills. But

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science, to gain the habitudes and insights they need to bring an effective and informed intelligence to their forthcoming tasks of citizenship. And, sad as it is to admit it, other negative factors would be related by many.

To state all of this, however, does not suggest to the writer that the picture is totally black. Neither the members of ASCD nor its officers, in short, should put on hair shirts, beat their breasts, and cry "Failure" to all who will listen. Yet at times they seem to want to do this, belaboring themselves because they have not found a magic formula that will solve all problems overnight. This is unfortunate, since it could easily engender a passion to get *something* done.

The basic problems with which ASCD has concerned itself do not lend themselves to each solution, however gifted the membership. No committee or commission, no national, regional or state meeting, will solve these problems within a year or within a decade. Whatever the depth of our understanding of learning, at all chronological and intellectual levels and in relationship to all social and cultural conditions, only the foolhardy would assume that we have the final answers in hand. And so with the projection of curriculum patterns or with our understanding of what it is that marks off effective citizenship. The critical problems that must be faced in education are

recurring problems, problems that do not stay solved for two quite simple reasons: (a) the social conditions under which they arise are not static; and (b) the knowledge we gain is always a springboard to further knowledge.

When thus viewed the educational picture changes and luminous spots appear within what earlier seemed to be total darkness. Curriculum development is a strong interest within the country. Supervisors have taken a further look at their job. More administrators are sensitive to the need to provide professional conditions for the teachers they serve. Many buildings are functional to a degree that seemed impossible to achieve but a decade or so ago. The student, even as he multiplies so rapidly that all facilities grow increasingly inadequate, is treated more and more humanely, with his education becoming increasingly relevant to the life of which he is a part. There is ferment in education, in short, and ASCD has had a share in bringing this about. If it keeps its eye on the ball, remembering that the important determination to be made year by year is the *direction* of movement within education, the Association will be a continuing force for the progressive improvement of education.

—H. GORDON HULLFISH, *professor of education, The Ohio State University, Columbus.*

### Behavior of Leaders (Continued from p. 176)

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